

Comments on the proposed conservation of the names *Hydrosaurus gouldii* Gray, 1838 and *Varanus panoptes* Storr, 1980 (Reptilia, Squamata) by the designation of a neotype for *Hydrosaurus gouldii*
(Case 3042; see BZN 54: 95–99, 249–250; 55: 106–111)

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We should like to comment on the application by Dr Robert Sprackland, Prof Hobart Smith and Dr Peter Strimple, published in BZN 54: 95–99 (June 1997), and on the subsequent comment made by Dr Glenn Shea and Dr Harold Cogger (BZN 55: 106–111, June 1998).

1. The taxonomic situation of the taxa involved is clear and has been extensively described by Storr (1980), who first discovered the presence of two morphologically distinguishable sibling species of Australian sand goannas (*Varanus gouldii* auct.), the biological and ecological distinctness of which was subsequently shown by Shine (1986). The problem arose because Storr, before deciding which of his two sibling species would be the new, unnamed one, failed to investigate the putative type specimen of the form that had already been named and described, i.e. *Varanus gouldii* (Gray, 1838). Unfortunately, he renamed this species as *V. panoptes* Storr, 1980.

2. *Hydrosaurus gouldii* was not typified by its author (Gray, 1838) but much later the species was based by Mertens (1958) on a dry mounted specimen in the Natural History Museum, London (BMNH 1946.9.7.61), which he designated as the lectotype. The specimen accorded with the original description by Gray: 'two yellow streaks on the sides of the neck', which are still easily discernible (see Böhme, 1991, fig. 1). The specimen is labelled as originating from Northwest Australia, which is an area where both species occur in broad sympatry.

3. One of us (W.B.) demonstrated the lectotype of *H. gouldii* Gray, 1838 to be taxonomically identical with the holotype of *V. panoptes* Storr, 1980, the latter name becoming consequently a junior synonym of the former (see Böhme, 1991). Because of this situation, the next oldest available name had to be applied to the second, widespread species: *V. flavirufus* Mertens, 1958, first published as *V. gouldii flavirufus*.

4. In their application Sprackland et al. accepted that the actions of Mertens (1958) and Böhme (1991) were formally correct under the Code, but severe doubts have now been cast by Shea & Cogger on the validity of Mertens's lectotype designation. However, Shea & Cogger did not mention that Mertens stated: 'Mr J.C. Battersby verdanke ich die Festlegung des Lectotypus dieses Warans sowie einige Angaben darüber' ('I owe the designation of the lectotype of this monitor lizard to Mr J.C. Battersby, as well as some remarks on this matter'). Thus, Mertens's choice of lectotype was suggested to him by Mr Battersby, who worked in the Natural History Museum, London, and who should have been familiar with historical details of the BMNH collections.

5. In spite of what has been claimed by Sprackland et al. in Case 3042, the nomenclatural concept proposed by Böhme (1991) has been accepted by quite a number of authors, a fact ignored by Shea & Cogger. The most important recent

general references which deal with monitor lizards on a world-wide scale are Bennett (1995, 1996, 1998), de Lisle (1996), Eidenmüller (1996), Kirschner, Müller & Seuffer (1996), Ziegler & Böhme (1997) and Böhme (1997). It may be noted that the two last-named references are purely taxonomic and nomenclatural works respectively, and moreover the only ones listing and discussing all living species and subspecies of the VARANIDAE; the last reference is an updated and revised checklist complementing the famous *Tierreich* list by Robert Mertens (1963). All these works use *V. gouldii* (including its junior synonym *panoptes*) for the disjunctly distributed species (northern, western Australia, New Guinea) and *V. flavirufus* for the widely distributed Australian species. It is therefore no longer tenable to state that 'the name *flavirufus* has rarely appeared and to our knowledge never been used in place of *gouldii*' (para. 7 of the application). On the contrary, great confusion would arise if the nomenclature of Böhme (1991) were to be altered again.

6. A particularly weak argument used by Sprackland et al. (para. 7 of their application) is that 'both *V. gouldii* and *V. panoptes* feature in documentation relating to conservation of protected species and their names are listed in the *World checklist of threatened amphibians and reptiles* (1993, pp. 48, 49) and in the most recent publication (1996) issued by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)'. We think that conservation and legislative authorities are users rather than creators of taxonomic progress and possible nomenclatural consequences involved. They should therefore rely on scientific reasoning and not vice versa.

7. In summary, the comment by Shea & Cogger has challenged the validity of the lectotype designation for *Varanus gouldii* by Mertens (1958), but some doubts still remain in their reasoning. We ask the Commission to consider our arguments before designating a neotype, as proposed by Sprackland et al. and Shea & Cogger. If the neotype is, indeed, designated, we prefer that it should be the specimen selected by Shea & Cogger. The tail tip, the pattern on which is an important diagnostic feature within the taxa concerned, is missing from the specimen proposed by Sprackland et al.

Additional references

- Bennett, D. 1995. *A little book of monitor lizards*. 208 pp. Viper Press, Aberdeen.
- Bennett, D. 1996. *Warane der Welt — Welt der Warane*. 383 pp. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main.
- Bennett, D. 1998. *Monitor Lizards: natural history, biology and husbandry*. 352 pp. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main.
- Böhme, W. 1997. *Robert Mertens' Systematik und Klassifikation der Warane: Aktualisierung seiner 1942er Monographie und eine revidierte Checkliste. Addendum to the reprint of Robert Mertens' 'Die Familie der Warane (Varanidae). Erster bis dritter Teil'*. Pp. 8, i–xxii. Edition Chimaira, Frankfurt am Main.
- De Lisle, H.F. 1996. *The natural history of monitor lizards*. 201 pp. Krieger, Melbourne, Florida.
- Eidenmüller, B. 1996. *Warane — Lebensweise, Pflege, Zucht*. 157 pp. Herpeton, Hanau.
- Kirschner, A., Müller, T. & Seuffer, H. 1996. *Faszination Warane*. 254 pp. Kirschner & Seuffer, Keltern-Weiler.
- Mertens, R. 1963. Liste der rezenten Amphibien und Reptilien: Helodermatidae, Varanidae, Lanthanotidae. *Das Tierreich*, 79: 1–26.
- Ziegler, T. & Böhme, W. 1997. Genitalstrukturen und Paarungsbiologie bei squamaten Reptilien, speziell den Platynota, mit Bemerkungen zur Systematik. *Mertensiella*, 8: 1–207.

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We welcome the support of Dr Glenn Shea and Dr Harold Cogger (their comment in BZN 55: 106–111) for our application to stabilise the usage of the specific names of *Varanus gouldii* and *V. panoptes* in their accustomed senses. We are happy to accept a new, well-preserved specimen (BMNH 1997.1 in the Natural History Museum, London) as the proposed neotype for *V. gouldii*. Indeed, a specimen in good condition is greatly to be preferred to the dried mount with limited observable details that we proposed.

Drs Böhme and Ziegler are opposed (comment (1) above) to our application to retain the usage of *gouldii* for the widespread *Varanus* species, and *panoptes* for that with the more disjunct range. They are proposing that the well-known name *panoptes* be abandoned, that the name *gouldii* be switched from the one taxon to the other, and that the little-used name *flavirufus* be adopted in place of *gouldii* as currently understood by the great majority of authors.

Drs Böhme and Ziegler contend that their alternative system of nomenclature is gaining ground. However, the publications that they have cited in support of this are very few and very recent (1995–1998) and include three by a single author (Bennett), one by Ziegler & Böhme, and one by Böhme. In the draft of an application by Drs Shea and Cogger to maintain the name *gouldii* for the widespread species and *panoptes* for that with the more disjunct range (i.e. the traditional usages), written coincidentally with our own, these authors supplied a list of 57 references to demonstrate the use of *gouldii* since 1991 (the year of publication of Böhme's proposed new nomenclature), and one of 56 references for the use of *panoptes* since its publication. Where a publication used only *gouldii* this was considered to be the accustomed sense of the name when the locality cited was well outside the known range of *V. panoptes*. These lists, copies of which are held by the Commission Secretariat, 'were not meant to be exhaustive but to give an indication of the breadth of usage of the names, which includes anatomical, ecological, faunal survey, parasitological, phylogenetic, physiological and general literature, published in international and Australian professional and amateur herpetological and natural history, zoological and ecological journals, herpetological monographs, Australian government publications, and popular books'.

Shea & Cogger (BZN 55: 106–111) have provided considerable evidence that Mertens's (1958) lectotype for *V. gouldii* was very unlikely to have been an original specimen seen by Gray (1838) when he described the taxon. Mertens himself (1958,

p. 248) pointed out that, although the specimen designated as the lectotype, which had been suggested to him by Mr J.C. Battersby in the Natural History Museum, London, was registered as from Gould's collection and dated 'Feb. 1837', Gould had not arrived in Australia by that date. Merten's lectotype designation is very probably invalid and there is thus no basis for Böhme's (1991) system of nomenclature.

Contrary to Böhme & Ziegler (their para. 6 above), we firmly believe that the use of stable nomenclature for the inclusion of species and subspecies in CITES and other legislative documentation is important. Taxonomists are the servants of the entire biological world that uses scientific names; we work to serve those needs, not to establish an authority to which everyone must subscribe whether convenient or not. Our own survival depends directly on the respect other biologists have for what we do; their interests — i.e. stability — determine our effectiveness. This seems not always to be adequately appreciated by other taxonomists.

We commend our application to the Commission.

Comment on the proposed suppression of all prior usages of generic and specific names of birds (Aves) by John Gould and others conventionally accepted as published in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (Case 3044; see BZN 54: 172–182)

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The application of Schodde & Bock comes as a response to the paper of Bruce & McAllan (1990), who showed that numerous names of birds proposed by John Gould and other ornithologists in monographic works and in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* (PZS) had appeared earlier in more popular periodicals such as *The Athenaeum*, *The Literary Gazette*, and *The Analyst* (for the sake of brevity I shall refer to these as the 'ancillary' publications, with no intent of impugning their significance to nomenclature). I oppose this application, first of all on the general principle that there should be some reasonable curb to further additions to the gigantic subsidiary literature of suppressed names and works already created by the Commission. Such suppressions should be undertaken only when there is a very real need — when there is truly a threat to communication and understanding in the zoological community. This is definitely not the case with almost all parts of the application of Schodde & Bock, to which I expand my objection on the following points.

1. The application must be viewed in the context of the acrimonious confrontations that have enveloped the nomenclature of Australian vertebrates in recent years, during the course of which Schodde vs. Bruce and McAllan have occupied bitterly opposing camps (e.g. see Olson, 1990). Although Bruce & McAllan (1990) have produced an important contribution to the history and bibliography of Australian ornithology, this is marred by their rather disingenuously making claims of priority for a few names that are certainly *nomina nuda* and a few others that are little better.